

THE STRAITS TIMES

February 19, 2002

100-year-old gets birthday party – for first time

Celebration organised by TOUCH Seniors Activity Centre in conjunction with Chinese New Year lunch for its clients

By Lau Fook Kong

Madam Liow Hup has lived 100 years without ever celebrating her birthday.

Born in China, she knows the year of her birth, but not the exact date.

But yesterday, she celebrated her birthday in style: “A party was thrown in her honour by the TOUCH Seniors Activity Centre in Geylang Bahru, which she visits every day.

It was a fitting day for the celebrations too, as the seventh day of the Chinese New Year is, according to Chinese custom, “everyone’s birthday”.

On hand to help her cut the cake were Mrs Goh Chok Tong, wife of the Prime Minister and the new patron of TOUCH Community Services, which runs the centre; and Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, the Minister of State for Community Development and Sports, who opened the centre in 1999.

They joined everyone in singing the birthday song for the centenarian in English and Mandarin.

The celebration was held in conjunction with a Chinese New Year lunch for 90 clients of the day-care centre, to mark the 10th anniversary of TOUCH Community Services.

Madam Liow enjoyed *yu sheng* with her friends from the centre and some of her family members. Speaking in Hokkien, she said, smiling: “This is like a family event!”

Madam Liow, who came here from China’s Fujian province, is part of a small group of about 150 centenarians here. The widow, who has seven adopted children, used to sell *soon kueh* in Toa Payoh until she retired.

These days, she visits the centre – located in the same block as her one-room rental flat – daily, and joins in its outings and activities.

To cap off yesterday’s celebration, she and the other elderly folks at the party also received *hongbao*.

The *hongbao* money was from the Love Singapore Fund, setup by the Faith Community Baptist Church to help the needy.

Madam Liow said: “I’m very grateful for the celebration. I’m very happy.”

The centre’s clients were not the only ones who received *hongbao* yesterday. Some 160 senior citizens also received red packets from the Singapore Maritime Officers’ Union and Wavelink Co-operative.

The union also organised a *yu sheng* lunch, games and karaoke at the Amara Hotel yesterday for them.

Among those at the party were former seafarers and residents from the Henderson Senior Citizens' Home.

Said Mr Lee Kok Yong, 82, a resident of the home: "We eat, sleep or watch television in the home. I am very happy that, today, I can come out and have a good time."